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BEETLEJUICE™

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TRIAL BY GHOST

By B.J. Specter

A MINSTREL BOOK
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CASE 10021

THE NEITHERWORLD* v. *LYDIA DEETZ

Flames were leaping out of Judge Hammer's eyes. He raised his wooden arm high in the air.

Lydia trembled violently . . .

Standing next to her was her lawyer. That was part of the problem. Her lawyer was Beetlejuice!

"Relax," the ghost told her. "I haven't lost a case yet."

"On the other hand," he added, "I've never won one either!"

BANG!

Judge Hammer slammed down his wooden arm as he roared out his verdict. . . .

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Beetlejuice #1: Beetlejuice For President

Beetlejuice #2: Lydia's Scream Date

Beetlejuice #3: Rock 'N' Roll Nightmare

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Beetlejuice #6: Trial by Ghost

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TRIAL BY GHOST

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For Matthew

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

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CHAPTER ONE

BAD TIME FOR BEDTIME

IT WAS THE MIDDLE OF WINTER AND THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT. Throughout the tiny New England town of Peaceful Pines, an icy wind raged. It rattled the windows and shook the walls.

In the large old house on top of the hill, the windows and doors shook more than most. Inside, Lydia Deetz had been tossing and turning in her bed for hours. She just couldn't get to sleep. She tried the TV. There was nothing gross or scary enough on to make her sleepy.

She was thinking that what she really needed was someone to tell her a scary bedtime story. Something with *spirit*, she added to herself. She smiled as she thought about whom she would ask.

At least there is one good thing about this boring little town, Lydia thought. She had a best friend no one else knew about.

All right, her best friend *was* a ghost! But that didn't make him any less of a pal. And all she had to do was say his name three times and—*kazam*!—the ghost popped right out of her dresser mirror.

"Beetlejuice," she whispered. "Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice."

She turned toward her mirror and smiled as she waited for the ghost's big lavender head to appear. It works every time, she told herself with a confident smile.

And it did work every time. Except this time. The mirror remained blank.

"Weird!" she told herself. Maybe she had whispered so quietly that he hadn't heard her.

"Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice," she said, louder.

Nothing.

Stunned, she tried again, louder this time. Then louder.

Still nothing.

Lydia gasped. She shuddered. She groaned. What if something had happened to Beetlejuice? It was too horrible to think about. How could she ever get through a day without her gross, slimy friend?

She didn't try to answer that question. Instead, she raced to her closet, pulled out her winter coat, and threw it on over her bathrobe. Then she slipped her bare feet into her black sneakers without pausing to tie the laces. Lydia dove through the mirror herself.

She raced down the creaky wooden stairs inside the mirror and headed for the Neitherworld, Beetlejuice's home.

Ghosts, witches, and goblins were hurrying along the street. For some reason, they all looked scared. They kept darting glances behind them. And when Lydia bumped into a troll, he screamed in fear.

Puzzled, Lydia hurried on her way.

Then she stopped short.

There was Beetlejuice's tacky roadhouse shack. Flashing neon signs covered the shack, as usual. But normally the signs were selling something. Tonight the signs flashed messages such as "BEWARE OF GUARD DOG!," "PREMISES GUARDED BY SPECIAL SECURITY SYSTEM!," "NOTHING FOR SALE!," and "NO RADIO, IT WAS ALREADY STOLEN!"

Strange! What had gotten into the ghost?

Lydia hurried up to the front and knocked the skull-and-crossbones door knocker.

"Knock knock," whispered the knocker.

"Who's there?" asked Lydia.

"Justin," whispered the knocker even more quietly.

Lydia leaned closer, trying to hear. "Justin who?"

"Justin case you're a robber I'm going to knock you one but good."

The knocker was true to its word. The brass skull flipped up in the air and knocked Lydia smack on the chin.

Lydia entered the Roadhouse in a daze.

"Your coat," croaked the Vulture by the door.

Inside, Lydia's friends Ginger, the tap dancing spider, and Jacques La Lean were pacing nervously. "Lydia," they cried when they saw her.

"What's going on here? Where's Beetlejuice?" Lydia asked.

"There's been a terrible string of burglaries in the Neitherworld," Vulture began. "Creatures are terrified."

"Everyone's living in fear," agreed Ginger. "Beetlejuice is so scared that he won't even get out of bed."

Relieved, Lydia smiled. "So that's why he didn't come when I called." She scooped up her coat. "I better go see him." She hurried up the rickety steps to Beetlejuice's attic.

"Oh, and by the way," Jacques added. "If you

go upstairs, watch out for ze traps Beetlejuice has set up."

But it was too late. There was a scream from upstairs.

Lydia was now limping around the hallway. A pair of Beetlejuice's green chattering teeth were clamped down on Lydia's big left toe.

SNAP! Another pair clamped down on her right toe. She yelped but her voice was drowned out by a siren screaming. Two blinding searchlights snapped on, shining right in her eyes. Then a spiderweb fell from the ceiling and wrapped her up in its sticky strands.

Lydia flailed her arms. But only for a moment, because now there were ropes snaking toward her from all sides of the room. The ropes wrapped themselves around her and began to tighten.

She fell to the floor with a thump. As she landed, Lydia's head hit a little black button.

"Uh-oh," she thought.

A metal cage landed around her with a deafening crash.

"One burglar caught," announced an electronic voice. "Thanks to the Beetlejuice Protection System."

Beetlejuice sprang out of his coffin bed. "Gotcha!" he yelled.

R.I.P.

"Beetlejuice," Lydia cried. "It's me. Lydia!"

"Lyds!" said Beetlejuice. He grinned. "It's so great to see you!" Then he had a bad thought. He removed his grinning head and flipped it back on upside down, so that now he was frowning. "How do you like that? My own friend tries to rob me!"

"I'm not trying to rob you!" Lydia yelled. "I just came to visit. Now get me out of here."

"You got it, babes." Beetlejuice picked up the tight bundle that was Lydia and threw her out the window with all his might. Lydia screamed. The ropes that were wrapped around her unwound fast.

"Hmm," said Beetlejuice. , "Looks like she's at the end of her rope!" Luckily, he was holding the *other* end. He tugged, and Lydia snapped back into the room like a yo-yo.

"Well, I'd love to stand around chattering," Beetlejuice told her, "but my teeth keep chattering by themselves." His crooked teeth began to do just that as the ghost dove back into his coffin. He pulled his blanket over his head.

"Beetlejuice!" said Lydia. She couldn't help smiling. "What's wrong?"

Beetlejuice had begun to scratch himself. One yellow eye peeked out at Lydia through a hole in

the moth-eaten blanket. "Haven't you heard? There's been a rash of burglaries," whispered the ghost. "I'm itching all over."

"Listen, Beetlejuice," Lydia said. "The reason I came down here is I need to hear one of those scary, gross stories of yours to help make me sleepy."

"No way," he whispered. "I'm too shook up right now." The whole blanket shook.

Then he stuck out his large egg-shaped head. "I mean, just look at these headlines!"

He held up several issues of the *Neitherworld News*. "BURGLAR STRIKES AGAIN!" blared one headline. "NEITHERWORLD LIVES IN FEAR!" screamed another.

"Not so loud," Beetlejuice told the newspapers.

"Can you believe that? This robber is a real meany!"

"Mmm . . ." Lydia yawned loudly. Suddenly she was very tired. The trip down must have worn her out. She started down the attic steps. "I'll see ya tomorrow, Beetlejuice. Sleep tight, and I hope the bedbugs bite."

"I hope so, too," said the ghost, licking his lips.

Outside the Roadhouse, Lydia found the street was deserted. Suddenly, she was wide awake.

She thought she heard footsteps.

Hmm . . . maybe scary stories weren't such a good bedtime idea after all!

She quickened her pace. But the footsteps seemed to hurry right after her.

Lydia broke into a run. The footsteps ran as well.

Wait a minute! she told herself. Those footsteps are probably *my* footsteps. She laughed. Or tried to. She was too scared. Then she forced herself to stop and listen. She heard nothing.

Finally Lydia whirled around and looked behind her.

Nothing there. She breathed a big sigh of relief.

Then she began to laugh at herself. Look at me, getting scared over nothing.

It was then she felt the gun sticking right into her back.

CHAPTER TWO

ARMED ROBBERY

"HANDS UP!" SNARLED THE ROBBER.

Lydia's heart was pounding. She raised her hands. Then she tried to turn and sneak a peek at her attacker.

"Turn around again and you're instant Hamburger Helper!" the robber growled.

"I don't have any money," Lydia stammered. She felt in the pockets of her winter coat and pulled out two mittens. "See?"

"No problem," said the thief. "I know where to get money. Plenty of it. Now march!"

Lydia marched. The thief hummed band music.

They turned the corner and almost bumped into the car that was parked by the curb.

"Halt!" commanded the robber.

The car was large and brown with a furry tail. The tail began to thump the ground happily.

"What's *that*?" Lydia asked.

"Don't you see it's a waggin?" asked the robber. "Get in!" Lydia reached for the waggin's door handle, but the door was locked. And when she tugged on it, the waggin started to bark.

"No! No! No!" the thief scolded her. "You can't just open a waggin like that! Pet it first, talk nice to it."

"Nice waggin!" said Lydia. She stroked the car's soft brown fur. A moment later, the car's headlights began to glow. The door swung open.

"Get behind the wheel and keep looking straight ahead," hissed the thief.

Lydia did as she was told. She heard the back door open. Then the gun pressed into her back again. She still hadn't caught a single glimpse of the robber.

"Now listen to me, and listen good," the robber said sharply. "You so much as glance into that rearview mirror to try to get a look at me, and you're history. Math, and English, too. Understood?"

Lydia cleared her throat. "I understand. But, S-Sir? There's just one little problem. I can't drive."

There was a silence behind her. "Right!" said the thief finally. "And I'm not a thief."

"No, really, I can't."

"Everyone in the Neitherworld can drive," said the thief. "Try to con me again and I'll blow you to smithereens!"

"I'm not from the Neitherworld," Lydia said quietly.

Another silence, then the thief whistled. "Just my luck. All right," said the low voice. "Driving's easy. I'll teach you." He began speaking very rapidly. "The first pedal is the gas. The second pedal is the brake. The third pedal is the extra gas. The fourth pedal is the extra brake. The fifth pedal is the zoom pedal. And the sixth pedal is—"

Close by, a rusty metal gate swung open with a moan and a groan. At the sound, the thief stopped his driving lesson abruptly.

"Quiet!" the thief whispered.

Down the street from them was a large brick building. The building had no windows, but it had lots of eyes that kept looking right and left. The sign on top read "NEITHERWORLD SAVINGS AND MOAN."

"See that rusty gate?" whispered the thief. "The one that just swung open?"

"Uh-huh," said Lydia.

"In a few seconds, an armored car will be coming out of there. I want you to follow it. Got it?"

Lydia nodded. A few seconds later, the armored car appeared, just as the thief had said it would.

"It's covered with arms!" cried Lydia.

"Dummy," said the thief. "I already told you. It's an armored car!"

The arms were all waving good-bye to the bank. The bank's eyes all winked back.

"Give it the gas!" the thief ordered Lydia. "But don't get too close until I tell you."

Lydia hesitated. She couldn't remember which pedal was which.

"C'mon," urged the thief. "The gas! The gas!"

Lydia looked down at the six pedals at her feet. Then she remembered. The thief had said the gas was the first pedal. She stepped on the pedal lightly and the waggin rolled slowly forward through the darkness.

For a few minutes they rode in silence, staying well behind the armored car. The loudest sound Lydia heard was her heart pounding.

"Okay," said the thief. "Now step on it! Give it the extra gas!"

"Let's see," Lydia thought aloud. "The extra gas pedal is the—"

She lifted one black sneaker in the air, then brought it down. "The fifth!"

"No!" shouted the thief. "The third!"

But it was too late. Lydia had hit the zoom pedal and hit it hard. In a streak of light, the waggin zoomed past the armored car.

"Four! Four!" screamed the thief in her ear.

She hit the fourth pedal as the waggin screeched to a halt. Behind them, though, the arms of the armored car were now pointing at them in a frantic warning. The armored car's siren went on with a blaze of red light. It spun around and started speeding back into town.

"Catch them, fool!" yelled the thief.

Lydia jammed down on the fifth pedal, turned the wheel, and the waggin zoomed off—right past the armored car.

"Back!" shrieked the thief.

Lydia braked with the fourth pedal, spun around, and hit the fifth pedal again.

Only now she was traveling in the same lane as the armored car. And she was zooming right toward it!

"FOUR! FOUR!" bellowed the thief.

The next split second seemed to Lydia to be happening in slow motion.

First, she lifted her foot.

She was going to slam down on the fourth

pedal, which she sort of remembered was the extra brake.

But—at the same instant—she saw that the armored car was rushing toward them.

The headlights of the armored car were growing large. The light was blinding her eyes.

She had to brake instantly. If not sooner.

And then, halfway through the split second, she had a thought. The sixth pedal, she realized, must be the zoom *brake*.

So just as the split second ended, Lydia did two things at once.

1) She cried, "Six!"

2) She moved her foot two pedals to the left and slammed down on the sixth pedal with all her might.

"WHAT?! NO!!!!" yelled the thief. "THAT'S THE ZOOM-ZOOM PEDALLLLLL!"

But it was too late. They were already zoom-zooming forward.

Lydia screamed. She let go of the wheel and covered her eyes.

She and the thief were now zoom-zooming right into the armored car!

CHAPTER THREE

WANTED! DEAD OR ALIVE!

WHAM!
CRASH!
BANG!

And then everything went black.

When Lydia opened her eyes, she was staring at the road. Except the road was upside down.

Then she realized where she was.

The waggin was lying on its back, howling, all four wheels in the air. And she was sitting upside down inside it.

Slowly—very slowly—the car turned back rightside up. It groaned sadly. Ahead of her, Lydia could see the armored car. It was upside down as well, balancing on its hands. Suddenly, the arms all flexed, as if doing one giant push-up.

The armored car sprung up into the air and landed back on its wheels again. Lydia rubbed her head. She was stunned but okay.

Then she remembered. The robber! But before she had time to look for him, she heard him.

"You there! That's right, you guys in the armored car! Out!" yelled the thief.

Lydia glanced to her right. But she still couldn't see him. The thief was hiding behind the waggin, with only his gun peeking out over the edge. He had the muzzle aimed right at the armored car.

"Come out with your arms up!" barked the thief.

All of the armored car's arms went straight up in the air.

"Not those arms," snarled the robber. "The guards' arms."

The two guards crept down from the front seat of the armored car with their furry arms up. For the first time, Lydia got a good look at the monster guards' faces. Their tall, ridged heads looked like trashcans with eyes. And their angry eyes were staring right back at Lydia. She shrugged helplessly.

"Open the back of the truck," ordered the thief. "One false move and I'll tie you up in more knots than a pretzel!"

The trashcans shook their heads in unison. "Never," they murmured.

"C'mon, I'm not foolin' around here," said the thief. "I'll give you to three and then I open fire. One!"

The two guards began to shake. But they stood their ground.

"Two!" said the thief.

The guard's whole bodies were shaking now. But they made no move to open the truck.

Oh, please, open the truck, Lydia silently begged. Please!

"THREE!" screeched the thief.

Still the guards didn't move.

The thief opened fire.

And out of the gun rattled a stream of deadly—

Insults.

Insults such as Lydia had never heard before. The gun called the guards names such as Garbage face!, Scaredy cat!, Puke breath!, Conehead!, and worse! Three thousand insults all in the space of a few seconds.

The guards were shaking violently as the insults struck them. They held up their hands and tried to cover their ears. But the noise of the insults was deafening.

And in moments the monster guards had been reduced to quivering jelly.

"Okay," the thief hissed at Lydia. "Go open the truck and load the moola into the car."

Lydia did as she was told. She made a wide circle around the two piles of quivering jelly that lay on the street. The piles were gurgling and bubbling and throwing off steam. It was awful.

She pulled on the handle of the truck's back door. The truck was locked. Now what would the thief do to her?

"Ah, sir?" she called. "It's locked."

"I know that!" the thief yelled back. "Get the key! Get the key!"

"But—"

"No buts. Reach in and take the key out of its pocket."

Lydia looked down at the piles of jelly in the road. She made a face. But she had no choice. She closed her eyes and held her breath, and reached into the goo. She had to search for several minutes before she found the key. Then she stole a peek at the waggin. She could only see the muzzle of the thief's gun, glinting in the darkness.

"Quit gawkin'," snapped the thief, "and start loadin'."

Lydia gasped when she opened the back of the armored car. The car was piled high with money of all shapes, sizes, and colors. Pictured on the bills were various monsters. It took Lydia twenty-three trips to load all the money into the waggin.

"I could use a hand," she called at one point.

"Who's giving the orders here?" the thief yelled back.

When all the money was finally loaded, she dragged herself back into the front seat. A moment later, the thief got in behind her. Again Lydia felt the gun at her back.

"Now zoom-zoom!" the robber commanded. "And I mean step on it!"

Lydia hit the sixth pedal and the waggin zoom-zoomed into the night.

She kept her foot pressed to the floor. The car went faster and faster. The landscape on either side of them turned into nothing but streaks of light.

Up ahead, about a million light-years away, Lydia spotted the entrance to a tiny dark tunnel.

"Uh, sir?" she yelled over the screech of the zoom-zooming car. "There's a tunnel up ahead."

"Go into it, fool!"

Half a second later, they were entering the tunnel. Lydia was driving in total darkness.

Lydia felt the car tilt. They were now driving straight down. Lydia screamed.

"Quiet!" said the thief.

"Where are you taking me?" Lydia asked, terrified.

"You're taking *me*, idiot," answered the thief. "I'm not taking you anywhere."

"Okay. Where am I taking you?"

"To the Neitherword Underworld," came the grumbled reply. "Now hit the extra brake."

"The extra brake," repeated Lydia. "Okeydoke." She lifted her foot. "The extra brake is pedal number . . . five!"

"FOUR!" shouted the thief.

It was too late. She had already slammed her foot on the pedal.

And now they were zooming on top of zoom-zooming, and they were going straight down.

Lydia and the thief were both screaming at the top of their lungs. And with good reason.

As it turned out, the Neitherworld Underworld tunnel ended with a brick wall. Lydia got a very close look at this wall, because she zoom-zoom-zoomed right into it.

BANG! SLAM! CRASH! CRUNCH!

The waggin gave one tiny yelp.

Then there was silence. Total silence.

A bell was ringing. Someone was knocking.

Lydia opened her eyes. And saw fog.

Through the thick mist, she could just make out where she was. She was lying on a pile of

gray stones in the middle of nowhere. Nearby was the huge brick wall she had slammed into. The ringing and knocking continued, and she realized where they were coming from. The sounds were coming from her own head!

"Oh!" she moaned. She felt something wet on her face.

She heard a soft whimpering. Waggin! The car was licking her gently with a tongue that came out from under its hood.

She managed to get to her feet. "Are you okay?" she asked the car. In response, the waggin managed to give a single thump with its tail.

Then Lydia remembered the thief. She whirled around. But there was no one around anywhere. She saw that the money was gone as well. So the thief had survived the crash—and vanished.

Well, she wasn't going to wait around to see if he came back, that was for sure. She hopped back into waggin and zoom-zoomed straight back up the tunnel.

She would go back to town, she told herself. She'd report the crime, then hurry back upstairs to her own house. "I've had enough of the Neitherworld for one night," she told the car.

Waggin's dashboard glowed as if the car understood.

But then it slowed to a halt. The car started to bark.

Then Lydia saw the road sign. It read "GASOLINE LAKE AND PARK, TURN RIGHT."

She glanced back at the dashboard. The red needle of the gas meter was pointing to "VERY HUNGRY!"

"You want gas?"

Waggin barked twice. She turned right.

When they came to Gasoline Lake, Lydia's door popped open. As soon as Lydia was out of the car, waggin drove right into the lake and started splashing around in the oily liquid, slurping it up greedily.

Lydia sat down on a nearby bench to wait.

"Wanted! Dead or alive!" she heard a voice calling. "Wanted! Dead or alive!"

She peered through the dark park. A monster made out of glue was making its way toward her through the park, slapping posters onto every tree it passed.

Slap! *Slap*! The monster passed Lydia's bench. She got up and examined the nearest "Wanted!" poster.

There was a picture on it. A very familiar picture. The teenage girl had black hair tied up in a ponytail that stuck up straight over her head.

It was a picture of Lydia!

GASOLINE LAKE
WANTED
DEAD OR ALIVE

CHAPTER FOUR

THROWN IN JAIL!

LYDIA GASPED.

She soon regretted having made a sound. The glue monster heard her. He paused in his work and stared in her direction. Lydia glanced quickly away. But it was too late.

"It's her!" gurgled the monster. "The bank robber!"

There were several other monsters in the park, Lydia now noticed. They all turned in Lydia's direction.

Now what? Lydia thought desperately. The monsters started running toward her. "Get her!" someone—or something—cried. "Catch her!" yelled another creature. "Eat her!" yelled a third.

Lydia had heard enough. "Waggin!" she yelled.

But the car was deep underneath Gasoline Lake and couldn't hear her.

She started to run. That was when she heard the sirens. She stopped. On her left, six police cars were now racing through the park toward her. She looked to the right. Seven police creatures on monsterback had joined the chase. They were galloping toward her at breakneck speed.

Lydia whirled around. Behind her, and closing fast, was the glue monster, waving his sticky hands in the air.

That left Lydia with only one direction to go. Straight ahead.

Straight ahead lay a thick forest. If she could make it to the forest, maybe she could lose the police in the woods.

She raced forward. She was running faster than she had ever remembered running before—certainly faster than she had ever been able to run in gym!

"She's getting away!" a creature yelled.

And so she was. She was nearing the forest. Just a few more yards. Lydia glanced back over her shoulder. She was going to make it!

But while her head was turned, a black high-heeled shoe reached out and tripped her. She fell in a heap.

"Hey, babes," said a familiar voice above her. "Where ya running?"

Beetlejuice grinned at her as Lydia scrambled back to her feet. "Not now!" she gasped as she tried to run again. But this time she slipped and slid in red goo. The goo was all bubbling out of Beetlejuice's head.

"Boy," he said. "You were running so fast, I didn't think I could *ketchup* to ya."

"Not now," Lydia shouted and turned to run again. But Beetlejuice's antics had cost her time.

The glue monster pounced on her, wrapping her up in his sticky arms. He was followed by the six police cars and the seven police creatures on monsterback.

"Good work!" said one of the police creatures to Beetlejuice. "You caught the Neitherworld robber." He hung a medal around the ghost's neck.

Beetlejuice looked surprised. "Gee, wow! For me?! Let's see, I'd like to thank my mother and father and—"

"Never mind that," barked the cop. He handed the ghost a wad of bills. "Here's your reward."

"Beetlejuice!" Lydia yelled as the police began dragging her away. "Help!"

Beetlejuice looked confused. "Help with what, Lyds? The police seem to have everything under control."

"Beetlejuice!" Lydia shrieked.

"Yes?"

"I - I thought you were my friend!" she called out.

"That's so sweet," yelled the ghost, waving. "I feel the same way." He waved the bills. "But," he added, "business is business."

Lydia stared after Beetlejuice in horror, then turned to the cops. "You're making a big mistake! I'm not the robber! I was kidnapped! I'm innocent!!!!!!"

The police creatures didn't answer her. Several pairs of hairy hands tossed Lydia into the back seat of a police car. The car seat had hairy hands of its own. Like seat belts, the hands grabbed all her limbs and locked her in tight.

"Where are you taking me?" Lydia asked. She tried to keep her voice from shaking. She did not succeed.

The police creatures still didn't answer. With a wail of sirens, the police cars all pulled out of Gasoline Park.

"Here's your cell!" bellowed a guard. A scary-looking police creature opened a metal gate, threw Lydia in, and shut it again. Then he locked the door sixteen times. In one hour, Lydia had

been fingerprinted, booked and jailed for a crime she didn't commit. But no one believed her. No one would even listen to her!

The small cell had a bunk bed with three levels. Sitting on the top, staring down at her, was a huge big-bellied monster. Pictures of food swam constantly in his eyes. Then Lydia spotted an even more terrifying sight. A picture of Lydia herself swam across both of the monster's eyes! She was sitting on a plate, surrounded by vegetables.

The monster reached down with one long arm and scooped Lydia up in his fist. He held her up to his eyes. His breath was terrible.

"What is name of you?" he demanded.

"Lydia," Lydia managed to say. "And you are?"

"My name Belly."

"Billy? Nice to meet you, Billy."

"Noooooooo!" The monster's eyes turned black with anger, then blue, then green. "*Belly*." He slapped his huge belly with his free hand. "Get it?"

"You better get his name straight," a low voice warned her. "Or he'll swallow you without even a gulp. He's serving time for overeating, see? C'mon, Belly, let her go."

Lydia was able to turn her head just enough to see who was talking. Standing below her was

another prisoner, a short, bald man with a pencil-thin black mustache. This monster looked almost human, but he had shifty eyes. Very shifty. They kept shifting all over his face.

"I said let her go," the shifty-eyed prisoner repeated.

"Okay," said Belly. He dropped Lydia to the stone floor and settled back in his bed.

The creature with shifty eyes helped Lydia to her feet. "Are you all right?"

"Terrific," said Lydia. "I'm in jail for a crime I didn't do, and all my bones are broken. But other than that—"

"Yeah," whispered her cellmate. "But it could have been worse." He jerked a thumb up at Belly. "You got to watch out for that one. When he gets hungry, he'll eat anything. People, buildings, countries, you name it."

Lydia eyed Belly warily. He seemed to be sleeping. "So I see."

"And what are you in for?" the man with the shifty eyes asked her.

"Bank robbery," said Lydia sadly.

The prisoner's eyes spun wildly. "Wow! That's fantastic!"

Lydia smiled. "You're impressed?"

"Sure," said the prisoner. "All I've ever been able to do is make counterfeit money."

Before her eyes, the man changed into a pile of Neitherworld money. One of the bills, she noticed, had a pencil-thin mustache. The eyes of the monster pictured on this bill looked very shifty.

"Neat!" said Lydia.

The prisoner, when he changed back into himself, was smiling proudly. Lydia dusted off her hand on her striped pajamas and held it out to shake. "I'm Lydia Deetz," she said. "What's your name?"

"I don't like to say." The man's eyes spun around to the back of his head, then returned just as quickly. "All right, I guess the coast is clear. Nick Name," he whispered.

"All right," said Lydia. "We'll use your nickname. What is it?"

The prisoner's shifty eyes shifted angrily. "No, no, no! That's my name."

"What is?"

"Nick Name."

"Your name is your nickname?" Lydia asked, totally confused.

"No! My name *is* Nick Name."

"Ah! Got it!" said Lydia. "Your name is Nick Name."

The prisoner clapped his hand over her mouth. "Quiet!" he shouted. "You want everyone to hear?"

Up on the third bunk, Belly stirred. "Who woke me up?" he roared.

Nick Name pointed quickly at Lydia. Belly's huge eyes grew even larger.

"No!" she cried. "I wasn't the one, I—"

The monster scooped her back up in his huge hand. He opened his mouth and dangled Lydia above his sharp, wet teeth. He was squeezing her too hard for her to scream.

Time to think quickly, Lydia thought.

It was her last thought.

Belly swallowed her in one gulp.

CHAPTER FIVE

LYDIA GETS A LAWYER

"DROP HER, BELLY!"

It was the monster guard. He had come by just as Belly dropped Lydia into his huge mouth.

Belly belched and Lydia came flying out, landing with a crash on the floor.

"Yuck!" said Lydia, trying to wipe herself off.

The guard was busy opening the door's sixteen locks. "Lydia Deetz!" He bellowed even though she was only a few feet away. "Come with me!"

Lydia grinned with relief. She knew this nightmare couldn't last. "Later," she told her cellmates. "Keep in touch!"

The monster guard led her in to an office with a big desk. The sign on the desk said SERGEANT BADGE. Badge was waiting for her. He handed

her a phone. "You get to make one phone call," he explained.

"Oh," said Lydia, feeling horribly disappointed. She called the only person she could, under the circumstances. She didn't use the phone, but she said his name aloud three times. "Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice, Beetlejuice!"

The ghost appeared instantly. He was wearing a shabby suit with a wilted purple flower in the lapel. "Hi, Lyds. Hi, Badge."

"All right," Lydia said, crossing her arms. "You got your reward. Now why don't you pay me back by getting me out of here."

"You got yourself a deal," Beetlejuice promised. "But, it's going to cost you." The ghost snapped his fingers and produced a small white business card. He handed it to Lydia. It read "B. J. SPECTER, ATTORNEY AT LAW."

"You expect me to hire you as my attorney?" Lydia asked.

"Believe me, I'm the best lawyer in the Neitherworld. I can get you out of here, no problem," Beetlejuice assured her.

"That'll be the day," Badge said gruffly. He clapped his hand down on Lydia's neck. "Time for the lineup."

"The lineup?" Lydia asked, worried.

Beetlejuice strode up and down the room. "This is an outrage. My client won't stand for it!" Lydia found herself flying across the room. She plopped into a chair. "See what I mean?" said Beetlejuice. He roared with laughter. Then he said, "What's a lineup?"

"A lineup," said Lydia, "is when they line you up with other people to see if witnesses can pick you out of a crowd. Right?"

Badge nodded. "Let's go!" He handcuffed Lydia and led her and Beetlejuice into another, smaller room.

"That's a one-way mirror," Badge explained, nodding toward the glass wall. "Our witnesses stand behind it. They'll be able to see you, Lydia, but you won't be able to see them. Then *we'll* see if the witnesses can identify you."

"Witnesses?" Lydia said. "What witnesses?"

"We've got two piles of quivering jelly out there," said Badge. "And they both say you robbed the Savings and Moan truck."

"Beetlejuice," Lydia whispered. "I'm sunk! Those witnesses saw me driving the car. The robber was hiding and was out of sight the whole time. They probably thought I was the one who—"

Beetlejuice interrupted, "Oh, so what if they identify you? Big deal."

Lydia stared at the ghost in amazement. Then she turned back to Badge. "What happens if these witnesses of yours identify me?"

"Then we lock you in jail for life and throw away the key," promised Badge.

Lydia groaned. "Okay," she said to Badge. "Where are the other suspects?"

"What other suspects?" Badge asked.

"I thought that in a lineup you're supposed to have other suspects. Then you see if the witnesses can pick out the right one."

"Oh, making trouble, eh?" said Badge. He opened the door and called to another police monster. The two conferred quietly.

Lydia grabbed Beetlejuice's arm. "I thought you were my lawyer," she whispered fiercely.

"I am," agreed the ghost.

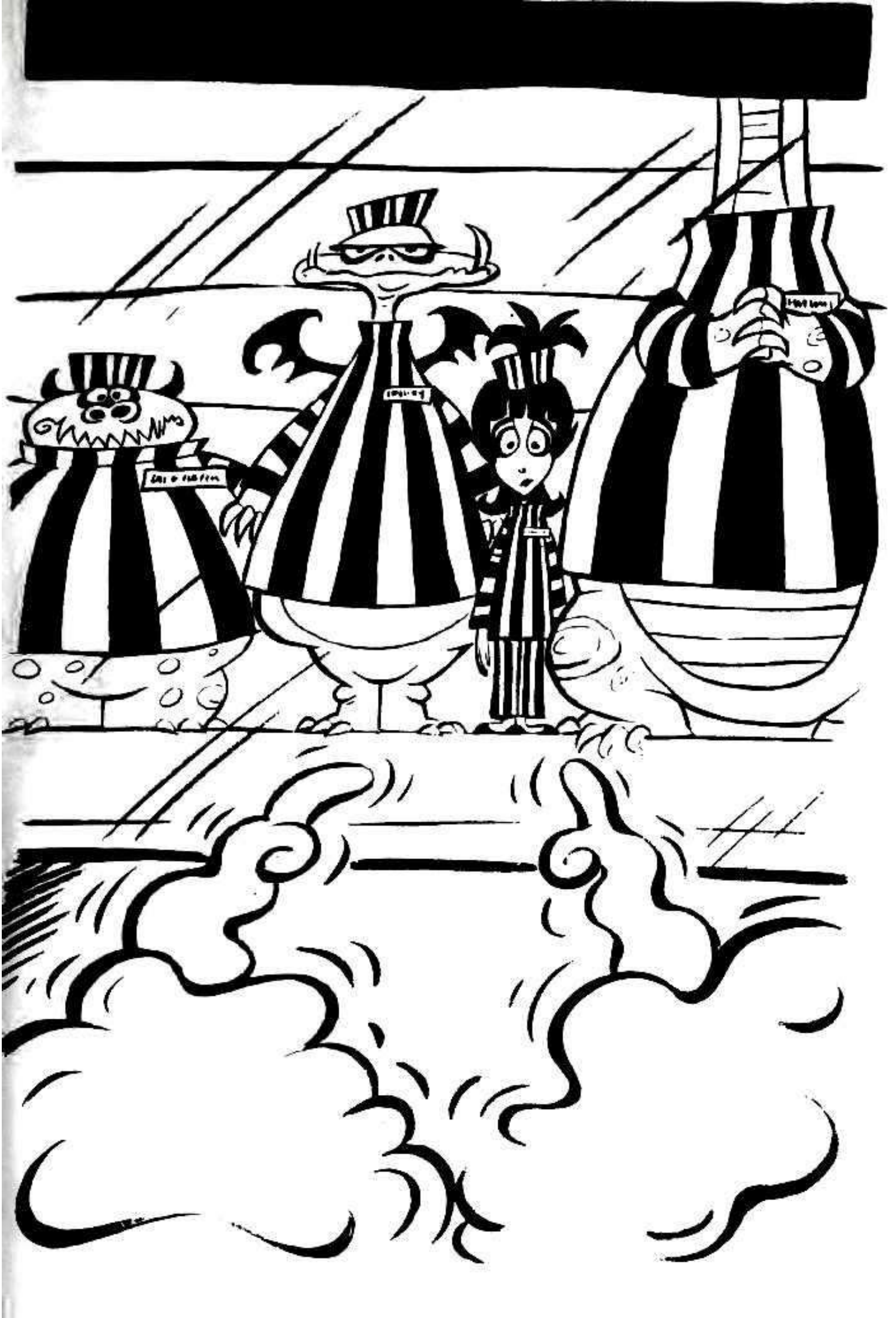
"Then why don't you stick up for my rights?"

Beetlejuice held a stick up.

Badge finished talking with the other police creature. "All right," he told Lydia. "We're getting you some other suspects."

A moment later, three green dragons in prison pajamas filed into the room. They lined up next to Lydia.

"Suspects, face right!" boomed Badge's voice over the loudspeaker system.



The three dragons and Lydia all faced right.

"Suspects!" boomed Badge. "Face left."

The suspects turned left. "Beetlejuice," Lydia said. "What should I do?"

"Just don't worry," the ghost advised.

"Don't worry? asked Lydia. "I've been arrested, I'm in jail, they've got witnesses—"

"There!" yelled a voice of quivering jelly over the loudspeaker. "That's her! That's the one who robbed us!"

Beetlejuice gave Lydia a sick grin. "Hmm. I guess you can start worrying."

CHAPTER SIX

"I CONFESS"

BADGE LED LYDIA AND BEETLEJUICE to a room marked CONFESS OR ELSE. He pushed them in, then closed and locked the door behind them.

"Beetlejuice," Lydia said, "I'm frightened."

"Oh, come on," the spirit answered. "You've seen furniture before."

"That's not what I mean and you know it!" Lydia cried. "Why are you being so—so awful?!" A tear rolled down her cheek.

Beetlejuice looked surprised. "You don't like jail?"

"Like it? Beetlejuice! This is a nightmare!"

"Oh, all right," said the ghost. "Then I guess I'll have to get you out."

Lydia felt a surge of hope. "Oh, will you? Can you? How?"

"No problemo," Beetlejuice told her. "Why, this case is easy as pie." A piece of pie appeared on the ghost's greasy palm. Beetlejuice smacked his lips. "Mmmm . . . apple!" He offered it to her.

"No thanks," she said. "I'm not feeling hungry just now. In fact, I feel like throwing up."

"Then take it for later," Beetlejuice whispered. He winked. He winked again. Finally, Lydia took the pie.

"Hide it," hissed the ghost. Lydia angrily shoved the pie slice into her pajama pocket. "Good," said the ghost. "Just remember. There's nothing to be afraid of."

Just then, the door burst open. In strode a huge monster with a large hot lamp growing out of his head. "Siddown," he snarled at Lydia.

Hot Lamp glared at Beetlejuice. "Who are you?"

The ghost was trembling too hard to answer.

"He's the one who just told me there's nothing to be afraid of," said Lydia. "My lawyer."

"Are you sure you want your lawyer present?" Hot Lamp asked Lydia.

Lydia shrugged. "I guess so."

"It's your funeral," said Hot Lamp, sitting down facing Lydia. He leaned forward so his lamp shone directly on Lydia's face. Beads of sweat popped out on her forehead. "Why did you rob the Savings and Moan?" Hot Lamp asked.

"I didn't," she said. "I swear."

Hot Lamp reached up and turned up the knob on his head. Sweat now poured off Lydia in streams. "I'll ask you again," said Hot Lamp. "Why did you rob the Savings and Moan?"

Lydia was starting to feel faint. The room was spinning. "Beetlejuice, please help!"

"You got it, babes," said her lawyer. He lifted her from the chair and sat down in her place. "Want to play rough, eh?" he told Hot Lamp. "Well, check this out!" He turned himself into a huge block of ice that chilled the room.

Hot Lamp growled in anger. "Just for that I'll melt you off the face of the Neitherworld!" He reached up and turned his lamp to NUCLEAR MELTDOWN. Then he leaned toward Beetlejuice.

"No!" yelled Lydia, lunging toward her friend. But she was too late. There was a sickening sizzling sound. Beetlejuice's flesh turned to goo and dripped off his skeleton in a thick puddle. Then his skeleton melted, too.

"Uh-oh," said the ghost's lips, just before they melted into the goo. "I think I'm oozing my shape!"

Then he was gone.

"He was my friend," Lydia cried, pummeling Hot Lamp with her fists.

Netherworld
Police

"He was a fool," said Hot Lamp. "Sit back down."

Hot Lamp was glowing bright red. Suddenly, the lamp clicked off. Hot Lamp fiddled with the knobs angrily. "What a time for my bulb to blow," he muttered.

"Serves you right!" snapped Lydia. "I hope your bulb never works again!"

Hot Lamp glared at her hotly. "Don't worry," he said. "I'm still going to get a confession out of you." He rolled up his sleeves menacingly. "Even if I have to wring it out of you. And I mean wring!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

JAILBREAK!

BACK AND FORTH, BACK AND FORTH—Lydia paced her tiny cell. A chorus of snores serenaded her. Belly and Nick Name were both sleeping.

Lydia didn't want to think what would happen to her when they woke up. How long did she have before Belly tried to gobble her up again?

She was pretty sure she was going to find out. In desperation, she had signed Hot Lamp's twenty-page confession. She had tried to resist, but Hot Lamp had wrung her neck. And that was just for starters. He had also wrung her arms, her legs, and her stomach. By the time Hot Lamp started wringing her toes, she was ready to confess to anything. Anything to get him to stop wringing.

Now she would spend eternity in the Neitherworld Jail.

"Stop pacing and go to sleep!" bellowed the giant monster guard, who was walking past the cell.

Lydia was so startled she fell over backward. She knocked over a bucket and it rattled around the stone floor. The sound seemed as loud as thunder. Belly stirred.

"Nighty-night snack," he mumbled to himself. He reached out of bed and felt around the cell floor.

The first time Belly's hairy hand came near her, Lydia jumped over it. But the hand kept searching. Pretty soon, it was chasing Lydia around the dark cell.

She managed to dodge the hand for a while. But it was Belly's other hand that caught her.

"Yummy nighty-night snack," murmured Belly, opening his huge dark mouth.

Thinking quickly, Lydia shoved her hands into her striped pajamas and pulled out—

The gooey piece of apple pie Beetlejuice had left her. She dropped it into Belly's mouth.

"Mmmmmmmm . . ." sighed Belly. "Yummy." His grip loosened. She slid out of his fist and climbed back down.

Suddenly, Belly belched. Something struck Lydia on the head.

"Not too tasty," said Belly in his sleep.

Lydia felt around in the dark until she found what had hit her. It was a big, wadded-up piece of paper. She smoothed the paper out. Then she held it up to the thin ray of light that slanted through the cell's tiny window.

"JAILBREAK AT THREE A.M. BE PREPARED — YOUR LAWYER."

For the first time in hours, Lydia felt a twinge of hope. Could it be true? Her heart was pounding. She looked quickly at her watch. One minute till three!

Suddenly, a hand snatched the paper away.

"Give me that!" cried Lydia.

But it was too late. "Fabulous," whispered Nick Name, after he read the message. "Oh, I'm free! I'm free!"

Even though Nick spoke in a whisper, Belly sat straight up. "Free?" he asked. "Who say free?" He grabbed the note.

"Free," he said in a deep voice filled with wonder. Then he tried to eat the note all over again.

"Just think of all the money I can counterfeit," said Nick Name. He was eagerly packing up his few possessions.

"I haven't eaten a building in three years," Belly said, swallowing the bunk bed in one bite.

"Listen," said Lydia. "I hate to tell you this, but I don't think there's going to be any jailbreak. The last time I saw my lawyer, he was just a lump of goo."

Belly shook his head. "Free!"

"Well," said Lydia, "even if Beetlejuice somehow survived Hot Lamp's heat treatment, he's only going to be freeing me, okay? Not you two."

Four hands grabbed her at once. Belly's huge eyes stared right into hers. Nick Name's eyes shifted wildly as they stared at her from all sides. "We escape with you—or else!" said Belly.

"Right!" said Nick Name.

"Ahem!"

All three prisoners looked up at once. And all three froze.

It was the guard!

Or was it?

Lydia looked closer. The monster's hat was pulled over his eyes. But Lydia could tell the difference. This wasn't the guard at all. It was—

"The Monster Across the Street!" Lydia cried, rushing to the bars.

The Monster Across the Street was Beetlejuice's friend and neighbor. Right now he was holding a frying pan in one hand and a set of keys in the other.

"HI, LYDIA!" he roared. "BEETLEJUICE HIRED ME TO HELP YOU ESCAPE," he bellowed. "HE SAYS WE HAVE TO BE VERY QUIET SO WE DON'T AROUSE SUSPICION!"

Then he opened the cell door's sixteen locks.

"Watch out," the real Lydia warned. "These two prisoners are going to try to—"

"THERE!" The Monster Across the Street opened the sixteenth lock. He was nearly trampled. Belly and Nick Name had run right over him.

"Escape," said Lydia.

"ESCAPE, YES!" roared the Monster Across the Street as he got back up. "BUT I TOLD YOU TO KEEP YOUR VOICE DOWN. OR YOU'LL GIVE EVERYTHING AWAY! FOLLOW ME!"

Lydia followed. At the end of the hall they passed by the real monster guard. He was out cold. Little birds were tweet-tweeting around his head.

The Monster Across the Street bonked six more guards with the frying pan before they came to the exit to the prison. There sat one last guard.

"Halt!" said the guard. Then he took off his hat. Underneath was an ugly egg-shaped head, lavender skin, green buck teeth—

"Beetlejuice!" gasped Lydia. "I thought you were—"

"I went to the gym and got back into shape," said the ghost with a grin. He smiled at the Monster Across the Street. "So, did you remember to keep your voice down and hit all the guards?"

"ALL BUT ONE!" hollered the Monster Across the Street, klonking Beetlejuice on the head.

Beetlejuice disappeared. But as they came out of the prison, Lydia spotted him standing by the wall. He was shivering.

"I was out cold," he explained. Then he started to run. "This way!"

They raced through the darkness. A car sat waiting by the curb. The car's tail began to thump with pleasure as they ran up."Waggin!" exclaimed Lydia.

"He's been hanging around the prison ever since you got arrested," said Beetlejuice. "Like I always say. A dog is man's best car. Hop in."

The prison's siren began to wail. Waggin howled back.

"We better hurry," said Beetlejuice, getting behind the wheel.

"Zo," said a familiar voice from the back seat as they zoomed into the night. "What is ze next part of ze plan?"

Lydia whirled around. "Jacques La Lean!"

The French skeleton tilted his black beret. "At your service."

"As am I!" Ginger the black spider was tap-dancing on the seat beside him.

"KEEP THE NOISE DOWN!" bellowed the Monster Across the Street. "YOU WANT THE COPS TO HEAR US?"

Just then, six cop cars zoomed up behind them, lights flashing, sirens screaming.

"Hey, Lyds," said Beetlejuice. "Which is the zoom-zoom pedal?"

"Four," Lydia said. "No, six!"

But Beetlejuice had already pushed four. The car screeched to a halt. The cop cars drove right up beside them.

"Sorry, officer," said the ghost. "Was I zooming over the zoom-zoom limit?" Then he pushed the sixth pedal with all his might and the waggin zoom-zoomed away.

When she caught her breath, Lydia asked, "What do we do now?"

"MINIATURE GOLF!" yelled the Monster Across the Street.

"I need to use ze bathroom," said Jacques.

"I want ice cream," said Ginger, still tap-dancing.

"I meant about my case," said Lydia. "See, I'm still wanted for this major crime." Her excitement was starting to wear off. "Well," she said sadly. "I guess I just can't come down to the Neitherworld until they catch the real robber. Take me home, Beetlejuice."

Beetlejuice kept driving.

"I said take me home, Beetlejuice."

"I'd be glad to," said the ghost. "There's just one wee little problem. The Neitherworld Police know where you live."

"What?!!!!" Lydia almost fainted. "How?"

"I told them." He produced a fistful of bills. "Got another great big reward, too."

She started to choke him but it made the car swerve dangerously. She let go.

The Monster Across the Street snatched the money out of Beetlejuice's hand. "YOU OWE ME FOR HELPING LYDIA ESCAPE!"

"Well," said Beetlejuice, "easy come, easy go."

"I guess now we must catch ze real robber ourselves," said Jacques.

"Bad idea," said Beetlejuice, rolling his eyes all the way around once.

"Why?" asked Ginger.

"If we catch the robber, then my home security systems will stop selling," explained Beetlejuice. "Duh!"

Lydia stared at the ghost in disbelief. "What are you talking about?"

"Well, Lyds, it's simple, really. Remember that trap you got caught in? Thanks to the string of burglaries that's been hitting the Neitherworld, my traps are selling through the roof." Beetlejuice reached his hand right through the roof of the car and pulled down a TV. On the TV a commercial was playing. It showed a monster being robbed. Then Beetlejuice's lavender head appeared.

"Don't let this happen to you!" the ghost on TV said. The picture changed to show his special security system. "On sale, $1,000,000," said the ad.

Lydia was trembling. "Beetlejuice, I hate to hurt your sales, but I've got a real problem here."

"Where?" Beetlejuice said, craning his head.

"Byetljoose, we have got to find ze real criminal," said Jacques. "Zen zey vill let our Lydia go."

Ginger clapped her six feet at the thought.

"NO WAY," shouted the Monster Across the Street. "UNLESS I GET PAID DOUBLE."

"All right, double, it is," grumbled Beetlejuice, turning right. "Into the Underworld we go!"

CHAPTER EIGHT

INTO THE UNDERWORLD WE GO

LYDIA SMILED AT BEETLEJUICE. "Thanks."

"HEY!" yelled the Monster Across the Street. "THE UNDERWORLD IS TO THE LEFT! NOT THE RIGHT!"

"Thanks for nothing," Lydia added.

"Aw, can't you take a little ribbing?" Beetlejuice said, plucking out several of his ribs. He tossed the ribs out the window. Then he turned left and zoom-zoomed right into the dark tunnel to the Neitherworld Underworld.

"Now you have to be careful because there's a brick wall at the end of this thing," shouted Lydia as they drove straight down.

A second later, they smashed into the brick wall.

"You mean this brick wall?" Beetlejuice asked.

The group climbed slowly out of the waggin. Once again, Lydia found herself surrounded by a thick fog. It floated everywhere, making it very hard to see.

All around them, gigantic monsters were hurrying through the fog. The monsters hid their faces under big black hats. These monsters were even bigger than the Monster Across the Street!

"What are those?" Ginger whispered.

"Gangsters," Beetlejuice explained. "A whole gang of 'em."

"I don't zink we should let anyone know zat we are tourists," Jacques said nervously.

"So what's our plan?" Lydia asked.

"To try and find the robber," said the ghost. "But you oughta know, it was your plan."

Lydia stamped her foot. "*How* is what I'm asking."

Beetlejuice just shrugged.

"Look!" cried Ginger. She pointed across the street with three feet. Lydia followed her feet to see where she was pointing. Through the mist she could just make out what Ginger had spotted. It appeared to be a huge black-and-white balloon— with a door in it. Above the balloon a revolving sign announced that the place was called Balloon's Saloon.

"So?" said Beetlejuice. "I'm not thirsty."

"We could start our search for the robber there. Maybe he is in zis place," said Jacques.

"LET'S SEE!" yelled the Monster Across the Street, starting forward. But Lydia grabbed his leg.

"We've got to all go in together. We'll be safer that way.

With Jacques in the lead, and the Monster Across the Street dragging Beetlejuice, the group charged into Balloon's Saloon.

Then they stopped. And stared.

Inside were hundreds of giant gangsters, laughing and drinking chocolate milk. The moment the door opened, silence fell over the room. All eyes were on the strangers.

Ginger's six knees had started knocking. "Who's there?" Beetlejuice asked nervously.

"It's Ginger's knees," Lydia whispered.

"That's funny, I didn't even know she had a niece," Beetlejuice said.

The Bartender picked up a club. "Don't make me say it again. O-u-t!"

"Spells out!" said Beetlejuice. "Oh, I love spelling bees." He turned himself into a bee and tried to buzz out the door, but the Monster Across the Street caught him again.

"We're not leaving until you tell us where ze robber is who held up ze Zavings and Moan," said Jacques.

A hundred chairs scraped backward. Lydia had thought these gangsters looked huge. But that was when they were sitting! Now they were standing. And they *all* had clubs.

"Lyds? How about you go back to jail and we all promise to visit once a week?" asked Beetlejuice.

The gangsters raised their clubs. Now even the Monster Across the Street was trembling.

Suddenly Lydia had an idea. "Beetlejuice," she whispered. "Look sharp!"

"Huh?"

She tried again. "Beetlejuice, these guys are threadening us."

"Don't you mean threatening?" the ghost asked.

She tried once more. "We're pinning all our hopes on you."

"*Sew* what can I do about it?" answered the ghost, turning himself into a giant pin.

"Grab that pin!" Lydia ordered the Monster Across the Street. The Monster grabbed Beetlejuice's stomach. "Good," said Lydia. "Stick him right up against the wall!" And under her breath she whispered, "But be careful! This is a balloon we're standing in."

The Monster did as he was told. The gangsters all screamed."

That's right," said Lydia. "This is a real *stick up*. We'll pop this place wide open unless you tell us where the robber is—right now."

One of the gangsters moved forward into the light.

"No, Rudy!" yelled another gangster. "Don't rat!"

"But I am a rat," answered the first gangster. It was true. As he moved closer Lydia could see that this gangster had the face of a gigantic rodent! "The guy you're looking for is Tommy Gun," he said.

A cry of "Rat!" swept through the room.

"Quiet!" ordered Lydia. "Please continue, Rudy. Where can we find this Tommy Gun?"

"Well, as a matter of fact, it just so happens . . ." Rudy's beady eyes darted nervously around the room. "It just so happens he's upstairs right now."

"C'mon!" Lydia told her friends.

The group slowly made their way through the crowd of giant gangsters. "If anyone gets too close," Lydia told the Monster Across the Street, "poke Beetlejuice at the walls."

She said it loud enough for all the gangsters to hear. Nobody made a move.

In the back of the saloon they found a circular staircase. "I feel like we're going around in circles," joked the pin-shaped Beetlejuice as he threaded his way upward.

The stairs led to a black door. Beetlejuice held a finger up to the mouth of his pinhead, signaling for quiet. Then he took several steps back and charged at the door. Lydia, Jacques, Ginger, and the Monster Across the Street all followed.

Except—

Just before they reached the door, it opened. The five friends went flying inside and smashed into the far wall. Then they bounced off the rubbery sides of the balloon wall and went flying back out of the room again.

The next time they charged into the room, it was empty.

"He must have run out as we came in," said Ginger, peeking out the door.

"HERE'S TOMMY GUN'S WEAPON," hollered the Monster Across the Street.

"Let me see," said Lydia. The Monster handed her a gun. "Yup!" she said. "This is the same gun he used to hold up the bank!"

"Ooh-la-la! We should have captured him," moaned Jacques.

"Hey," said Beetlejuice, who was still shaped

like a pin. "Don't kid yourself. We were very, very lucky. My dull side hit the wall. I don't think I needle to tell you what would have happened if I hit the wall like this."

Beetlejuice touched the wall with his pointy pinpoint.

"Watch out!" Lydia shouted.

P O P !!!!!!!!!!!!!

*!!!!!!!!!!!!

"Too late," said Beetlejuice. His head swelled up until it popped. Then it reappeared.

"I'm afraid zat zey aren't running because they are afraid of us," said Jacques.

"Oh?" said the ghost. "Give me another reason."

Jacques didn't name it. He pointed a bony finger instead.

Police cars were pouring out of the mouth of the Underworld tunnel. In seconds, Lydia and her friends would be surrounded.

CHAPTER NINE

TWELVE ANGRY MONSTERS

"DROP THE GUN AND PUT YOUR HANDS UP! Now!" ordered a voice over a megaphone.

"Everyone keeps telling us to put our hands up," said Lydia. "Pretty soon they'll be asking us to do Jumping Jacks."

"Now do ten Jumping Jacks!" ordered the police through the megaphone.

"Jumping Jacques is my favorite exercise," raved the skeleton, as he hopped up and down. He was the only one jumping. Lydia just rolled her eyes.

"Please, Beetlejuice, do something," she begged. "I can't go back to jail, I just can't."

"You won't have to," promised Beetlejuice. "Give me that gun."

The ghost started spraying the police with insults. The police fired insults right back.

"Nyah! Nyah! Can't hurt me!" taunted Beetlejuice.

It was true. The insults weren't hurting the ghost and his gang.

"What's going on?" yelled one of the police creatures.

"They're covered in rubber!" yelled another police being, looking through a pair of binoculars. "Our insults are bouncing right off them!"

The police were backing up. Beetlejuice cackled with excitement. "Cowards!" shouted his gun. "Yellow-bellied lily-livered—"

The insults stopped abruptly. Beetlejuice looked down at the gun, puzzled.

"I think you just ran out of insults," said Ginger.

He had also just run out of time.

The very next second, the police pounced.

And the second after that, Lydia was back in the police car.

Lydia was sitting on a hard bench outside the courtroom. She was wearing handcuffs. And her stomach was in knots. Where was her lawyer? She peered down the hall.

Her trial would start any minute now, she

thought. It'll be a relief to get it over with. As long as I'm found innocent, of course.

Lydia nervously checked her watch. Just then, the double doors to the courtroom opened. A guard with six eyes appeared. "Lydia Deetz!" he called. "Judge Hammer will see you now."

"Judge who?" Lydia asked.

"Judge 'Throw 'Em in the Slammer' Hammer,'" said the guard. "The judge who loves to sentence everyone for life!"

Lydia turned to run but Beetlejuice suddenly appeared at her side. "Relax, babes," he said. "I've never lost a case yet."

He led her into the large courtroom. The room was huge, with a domed ceiling. Bats flew around overhead. Monsters packed the seats on either side of the center aisle. Flashbulbs popped as she and Beetlejuice walked in.

"There she is!" a witch cried. "The bank robber!"

"She stole my life savings!" shouted a big fat moth.

Then Lydia spotted two friendly faces. Jacques La Lean and Ginger were sitting at a table in the front row.

"My legal team," said Beetlejuice proudly.

"Don't worry about a zing," whispered Jacques.

"We'll get you off," promised Ginger.

Lydia gratefully shook Jacques's bony hand and Ginger's six furry feet. She felt better already. At least until—

A Frankenstein monster in a blue uniform stepped to the front of the courtroom and shouted, "All rise!"

All the monsters in the courtroom floated up toward the ceiling.

"The Honorable Judge 'Throw 'Em in the Slammer' Hammer presiding," roared the Frankenstein guard. "Hip! Hip! Hooray!"

A door opened.

At first all Lydia saw was a billowing black robe. Then she saw the judge's face. Though the judge had a human body, he had a face that seemed to have been carved from stone. It was the sternest face she had ever seen. The judge's eyes seemed to be on fire.

Judge Hammer's seat was way, way up high at a huge wooden desk. He slowly headed up the long flight of stone steps to his seat. Then the judge banged his entire arm on the desk. Except he had no arm. In its place was a large wooden gavel.

"You may be seated!" announced the Frankenstein monster guard. All the monsters floated back into their seats.

"What happened to his arm?" Lydia whispered to Beetlejuice.

"Belly bit it off after the Judge sentenced him to life imprisonment."

The Judge glowered down at the monsters in the audience. "Who is here to be tried?" he growled, his eyes smoking.

The monsters all pointed to Lydia. Despite her best efforts, she began to shake. The judge's red eyes seemed to burn right through her. When the judge again slammed his gavel arm onto the desk, she jumped.

"Throw her in the slammer!" he bellowed. "Life imprisonment! Next case!"

There was loud applause. But then the Frankenstein monster guard climbed up to whisper something in the judge's ear. Black smoke poured from the Judge's burning eyes. He banged his gavel once more.

"Quiet in the courtroom! My assistant, Frank N. Stein, has just informed me that we have to have a trial before we find Lydia guilty. I think it's a waste of time. But so be it." The judge banged his gavel again. "Case 10021. *The Neitherworld* v. *Lydia Deetz*. Frank? Swear her in!"

Frank N. Stein now approached Lydia. "Do you swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth?" he demanded.

"I do," Lydia swore.

"Do you swear to eat worms and eyeballs and laugh at the gross and scary parts of movies?" he asked.

"Huh?" said Lydia.

"Swear!" roared Judge Hammer, slamming his wooden gavel down on the desk. Lydia swore.

"Beetlejuice," Lydia whispered. "Things don't look good."

"Lyds, will you relax?" the ghost cooed. "I'm tellin' ya, I never lose!"

"Who is the prosecutor in this case?" asked Judge Hammer.

"I am," said Beetlejuice, leaping to his feet. "And I'm going to prove she's guilty, guilty, guilty!"

"What?" cried Lydia, Jacques, and Ginger at once.

"Mr. Specter," said Judge Hammer. "Do I have to remind you that you are the *defense* lawyer? Your job is to try to prove that Lydia is innocent." He put his gavel next to his mouth and whispered loudly, "Not that he has a chance of that!"

The judge laughed. The audience cheered.

"Sorry," said Beetlejuice. "It must have slipped my mind." As if to prove his point, his brain slipped out onto the floor. He flipped it back in. "See?" He chuckled and bowed to the audience. Every monster was silent.

"Mr. Specter," said the judge, his eyes smoking again. "This is a court of law. If you attempt any more shenanigans, I'm warning you, I'll throw you in jail right along with Lydia. Now—"

The courtroom doors opened and a greasy monster in a suit hurried in and slid into his seat with a sickening slurp. "Sorry I'm late, Your Honor," said the greasy monster.

"You're late!" shouted Judge Hammer. "Why?!"

"Your Honor," began the greasy monster lawyer. "I'm afraid that a key piece of evidence has been . . . um . . . stolen."

A murmur went through the courtroom. Every monster said, "Murmur, murmur, murmur."

Smoke billowed out of the Judge's burning eyes. "Mr. Greaseball, are you trying to tell me that you've blown the case?"

"Not at all," said Greaseball, wiping grease from his forehead with a greasy handkerchief. "I'm sure we will find this key piece of evidence any minute now. And besides, we still have a very strong case against Lydia. We can prove that she is guilty, guilty, guilty even without this evidence. It's just that, uh, well, I just wish that Beetlejuice here hadn't stolen our evidence."

Judge Hammer glowered down at the ghost. "Did you steal the evidence?"

"I would have," admitted Beetlejuice. "But I didn't think of it."

"All right," said Judge Hammer. "We've wasted enough time. I have a lot of other monsters I want to find guilty today. So let's get on with it. We'll start by picking a fair jury." He stared at the audience. "Who here believes Lydia is guilty, guilty, guilty?"

Every hand, hoof, and claw in the audience shot up.

"Good," said Judge Hammer. "Now who here not only thinks Lydia is guilty, but thinks her feet stink?"

Half the hands, hooves, and claws remained in the air.

"And who here not only thinks her feet stink, but thinks she's a pretty weird-looking monster, on top of it. So weird-looking, in fact, you want to see her in jail for life—or longer?"

Only twelve hands, hooves, and claws were still up.

"Excellent," said Judge Hammer. "There's our jury. You twelve, please come forward and take your seats in the jury box."

The twelve monsters came forward. They sat down and stared at Lydia. "Guilty, guilty, guilty," they mumbled over and over.

"Beetlejuice," whispered Lydia. "Shouldn't you object to this?"

Beetlejuice leaped to his feet. "I object!"

Judge Hammer leaned down and smacked the ghost on the head with his gavel. "Quiet!"

"Nice suggestion," Beetlejuice told Lydia. "It was a real hit with the judge."

"All right, Greaseball," said Judge Hammer. "You may begin your case."

Greaseball slid out of his seat. "The Neitherworld calls as its first witnesses, the two guards whom Lydia robbed."

The guards from the armored car were both still quivering piles of jelly. They sloshed down the aisle as they made their way to the witness stand. Frank N. Stein lurched toward them. "Do you swear to say Lydia is guilty even if you don't believe it?" he demanded.

The jelly monsters swore.

"Beetlejuice," whispered Lydia. "Object!"

"I do," said Beetlejuice, "I object to getting hit on the head." He stayed in his seat.

The jelly monsters both said that Lydia was the one who had robbed their truck. So did a string of eyeball monsters from the Savings and Moan building who said they were eyewitnesses to the crime.

"That's good enough for me," said Judge Hammer, slamming his gavel. "Throw her in the slammer! Life imprisonment!"

Again the audience cheered. The monsters in the jury broke out bottles of soda pop, put on party hats, and started dancing the monster hop.

Then Frank N. Stein and three other guards grabbed Lydia. "You're going away for good this time," muttered Frank.

"Beetlejuice!" Lydia cried. "Help!"

"Yes," begged Jacques. "Help her, Byetljoose!"

"Please!" pleaded Ginger.

The ghost shook his head. "The law's the law."

The guards were dragging Lydia away. "But I thought you said you never lost a case!" she yelled.

"And I never did," he promised her. "But then again, I've never tried one before either!"

Lydia fainted as the guards dragged her out of the room.

CHAPTER TEN

BEETLEJUICE'S DEFENSE

"BEETLEJUICE!" CRIED JACQUES. "We can't just let your friend go back to ze jail. We must do something!"

"Good thinking," said Beetlejuice. "We'll give her a farewell party."

"I was zinking more of giving her a defense. We're her lawyers, after all."

The guards were dragging Lydia out the door now. "You're right again, Jacques," said Beetlejuice. He jumped to his feet. "Wait!" he shouted at the guards.

The guards waited.

"What is the meaning of this?" shouted Judge Hammer.

"Your Honor," began Beetlejuice, trembling. "If

it's not too much trouble, we'd like to present Lydia's defense." He turned himself into a white picket fence. "See de-fense?"

"It *is* too much trouble!" ruled Hammer, banging his gavel. "Take her away."

The guards carried Lydia out the door.

"But you can't do that," said Beetlejuice.

A streak of fire blazed out of the Judge's eyes and burned Beetlejuice's bow tie to a crisp. "I can do whatever I want," said Judge Hammer. "I'm the judge." He banged his gavel arm. "Next case."

"Ginger," said Beetlejuice. "You're our legal history expert. Isn't there some Neitherworld law that says Lydia has to have a defense?"

Ginger jumped on the desk and shuffled her papers with her six feet. Papers flew all over the courtroom. One of the papers landed in Judge Hammer's hands. When he read it, his eyes glowed red.

"Hmm," he said. "It seems that Neitherworld law does require that Lydia get a defense." He banged his gavel arm. "Bring her back in."

"Nice paperwork," Beetlejuice told his spider assistant. Ginger beamed.

Lydia was still unconscious as the guards carried her back to her seat. Beetlejuice rose and strode up and down in front of the jury. "Monsters of

the jury," he began, "you're probably thinking Lydia is guilty."

"Guilty!" agreed all the jurors at once.

"But," said the ghost, "you're now going to see a whole new side of Lydia." He raced back to his seat and turned Lydia's head to the other side. "See?"

Judge Hammer banged Beetlejuice again with his gavel. "Get on with your case!"

"Hold it!" cried a voice.

All the monsters' heads turned toward the double doors.

In rolled another eyeball monster. "I was also at the scene of the crime," the eyeball said, taking the stand. "Lydia didn't do it!"

The crowd in the courtroom went crazy. Judge Hammer banged his arm for quiet.

"He's lying!" yelled Greaseball.

"See?" Beetlejuice told Lydia. "I always have something up my sleeve." A beetle crawled out of his sleeve. He snapped it up with his long striped tongue.

But Lydia wasn't watching the ghost. She was staring at the eyeball. Something about him looked very familiar. The pencil-thin mustache . . . the snide voice . . .

"Nick Name!" she cried out, before she could stop herself.

In horror, Lydia clamped her hand over her mouth. The eyeball immediately turned all red and bloodshot. "I told you not to use my name," he hissed.

Flame shot out Judge Hammer's eyes. "Nick Name? The counterfeiter?! The one who broke out of jail?!"

Nick Name changed back into his normal shape and started racing down the center aisle. But Frank N. Stein was too quick for him. He grabbed him, handcuffed him, and sat him down at Lydia's table.

"Life imprisonment!" roared Judge Hammer, slamming his gavel.

"I wanted to help you out, to thank you for getting me out of jail," Nick Name told Lydia bitterly. "I should have known it doesn't pay to be nice."

"Sorry," Lydia said sadly. Things were getting worse and worse.

Judge Hammer glared down at Greaseball. "Have you found that gun yet?"

"Er, not quite yet, your Honor, but I'm sure we'll—"

"Enough!" Judge Hammer belched smoke. "Who needs evidence anyway? I'm ready to pass judgment. Lydia Deetz. I sentence you—"

"Wait!"

All the monsters' heads turned to see who was coming through the double doors.

"Belly!" exclaimed Lydia.

Judge Hammer rose slowly to his full height. Even though the Judge was standing on a high platform, he and the huge monster were now seeing eye to eye. "You dare to come into my courtroom, you disgusting criminal?" gasped Judge Hammer. "You show your face, my lifelong enemy! You are the monster who has made my every day a misery!"

Judge Hammer was shaking. He looked angry. But he also looked scared! And when Belly moved closer, Judge Hammer cowered backward. "Guards!" he cried. "Seize him!"

Frank N. Stein and the other guards rushed at Belly from all sides. Belly ate all of them.

He burped, then yelled, "No punish girl!"

Judge Hammer was shaking more violently now. "W-h-y n-o-t?"

"This girl help me go from jail. And you no have case!"

"That's ridiculous," said Greaseball. "We have an excellent case."

With one hand, Belly picked up Greaseball and all his assistants. He piled all of Greaseball's papers on top of the lawyers. "Greaseballs go

down easy," said Belly. "But Belly need something to top off this lawyer sandwich." He looked around the room. Every monster that his gaze fell upon ducked down under his seat.

Then Belly spotted the two chief witnesses, the drivers of the armored car. He scooped up the two quivering piles of jelly and smeared them on top of the pile of lawyers and papers. He ate the whole mess in one gulp. "See?" said Belly. "No case."

Judge Hammer was desperately fumbling in the drawer of his desk. "I've got some more evidence right here," he stammered.

"Oh, yeah?" Belly ate the Judge's desk in two nibbles. He laughed loudly and jumped up and down with excitement. Then he stopped jumping.

"Uh-oh," said Belly. "Belly not feel so good."

He started to stagger around the courtroom. He grabbed his belly. "Belly ache," he said.

"Maybe Belly full?" suggested Judge Hammer. "After all, Belly ate big meal. Maybe time for Belly go lie down?"

Belly took the Judge's suggestion. He fell over with a crash that shook the entire building.

The Judge threw back his head and roared with laughter. "I knew he might come back here some

day," he told the crowd. "He always tries to eat my desk. So I put a sleeping potion in my drawers. Pretty clever, eh?"

All the monsters in the audience agreed that it was.

"Guards!" yelled Judge Hammer.

The guards crawled out of Belly's mouth. Greaseball and his greasy assistants slid out next.

"Seize him!" Hammer yelled.

The guards did as they were told.

Judge Hammer would not be interrupted again. Banging his gavel again and again, he now sentenced Lydia, Belly, and Nick Name to life imprisonment. "Throw 'em in the slammer!" he yelled.

"Didn't I tell you things would work out?" Beetlejuice said to Lydia.

Lydia felt close to tears. "What are you talking about? Things didn't work out at all."

"Well they did for me. Judge Hammer didn't sentence me to a thing!"

Lydia was about to strangle the ghost, but Judge Hammer interrupted her.

"And I sentence Beetlejuice to life imprisonment six times over," added the Judge. He banged his gavel one final time. "This court is dismissed!"

* * *

"Some lawyer you turned out to be," Lydia said.

"He is worst," agreed Belly.

"Stuck for life in this lousy cell," added Nick Name.

"Cell?" said Beetlejuice, who had joined them in prison. "I'll sell you anything you want. Just name your price."

Nobody laughed.

"As a matter of fact," said Beetlejuice, reaching into his deep pockets. "I just happen to have one of my extra-fancy home security systems right here." He pried open a large set of green teeth. "See? Catches the crook every time. I'll sell it to you for—"

"Look, Mac," said Nick Name. "We're already caught, okay? So shut your trap."

Beetlejuice did as he was told. The green teeth clamped on Nick Name's head. After he was done howling, Nick Name chased the ghost around the cell in circles.

"This is getting us nowhere," said the ghost, "I'm going to look on the bright side.

"What bright side?" growled Nick Name.

"Right over there." Beetlejuice pointed to the shaft of light coming in through the cell's narrow slit of a window.

"So?" said Belly.

"So," Beetlejuice explained, "Hammer usually sentences his prisoners to life imprisonment in total darkness."

"Oh, that's right," called the guard who was passing by their cell. "Thanks for reminding me."

And the thin shaft of light clicked off.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

SETTING THE TRAP

"NICE GOING," NICK NAME SNAPPED IN THE DARKNESS.

Beetlejuice answered with snoring. But Lydia shook him awake. "What do we do now?" she asked.

"Belly feeling hungry," Belly said. "Beetlejuice make a nice tasty morsel."

"Hey! Get away!" screamed Beetlejuice.

As angry as Lydia was feeling at her lawyer, she wasn't feeling *that* angry. "No, Belly!" she said. "Stop! I've got a much better idea."

She didn't actually have an idea when she said it. But somehow just saying she had one got her started. "Okay," she continued. "The problem hasn't changed. I've got to find the real bank robber, right?"

Beetlejuice, Belly, and Nick Name all agreed.

"So here's my plan . . ."

She leaned forward and began to whisper.

As usual, the night guard at the front of the Neitherworld Jail was sleeping on the job. He woke up quickly, though. Right after the gun pressed into his back.

"I hear one of the prisoners in this here jail is sitting on millions," snarled the robber. "You're going to lead me to that cell, and no funny business, see? Or I'll break you into more pieces than a jigsaw puzzle!"

"Sure," said the terrified guard. "Which prisoner did you have in mind?"

"Lydia Deetz."

"Right this way."

The guard led the robber right to Lydia's cell. "Here's her cell," he said.

"*And* the money," said the robber. "Now open the door."

The guard opened the sixteen locks as quickly as he could.

"Now shut your eyes," the robber told him as he entered the cell.

The guard shut his eyes.

He then heard the strangest series of noises.

First it sounded as if a set of large teeth had snapped shut.

Then another set of teeth snapped shut. The robber screamed. Next a siren wailed.

"Can I open my eyes now?" asked the puzzled guard.

He didn't wait for an answer. He opened his eyes. But just then a pair of searchlights snapped on and blinded him. He couldn't see a thing.

If he had been able to see, he would have seen a spiderweb fall from the ceiling. He would have seen ropes snake toward the robber from every corner of the cell. He would have seen a metal cage fall with a clang.

"One burglar caught," announced an electronic voice. "Thanks to the Beetlejuice Protection System."

Beetlejuice, Lydia, and Belly all sprang out of their hiding place behind the bunk bed.

"Here's the man who held up the Savings and Moan," Beetlejuice said proudly. "Tommy Gun!"

He pulled off the cage with a flourish.

But there was no robber inside. Just a gun.

"What?!" gasped the ghost. "Foiled again!"

"And I'll keep right on foiling ya," snarled the machine gun. "Now hand over the cash!"

For the first time, Lydia noticed that the gun had eyes.

"So you're Tommy Gun," she gasped.

"The same. And you're Swiss cheese unless you hand over that money right now. I'll insult ya all sky high."

"Whatever Tommy Gun say," said Belly. He scooped up the huge pile of dough sitting in the middle of the cell and handed it to Tommy Gun.

Except by the time he handed it over, it wasn't money any more. Nick Name had turned back into himself again. And before the startled gangster could make a move, Nick Name had emptied out all the gun's insults right onto the cell floor.

"Uh-oh," the gun said.

There was no point trying to run. Tommy Gun, the infamous Neitherworld robber, was caught at last.

"So that explains why we couldn't find our key piece of evidence," mused Greaseball, after Beetlejuice and Lydia had turned in Tommy Gun. "The gun must have walked off as soon as we turned our backs. Gee, you guys deserve a medal."

The Judge banged his gavel. Lydia began to tremble all over again.

But then she saw that no fire was pouring out of this Judge's eyes. A different Judge was on duty. This one looked strangely like a duck. "Who's that?" she asked her lawyer.

"'Set 'Em Loose' Goose," chuckled Beetlejuice.

"Belly, Nick Name, Beetlejuice, and Lydia," said the Judge, banging his gavel. "I find you all to be heroes. And you all deserve time off for good behavior."

He banged his gavel again and honked, "Set 'em loose!"

Belly and Nick Name both hugged Lydia. Belly roared, "Lydia save day!"

"What did I tell you?" Beetlejuice asked Lydia with a wink. "I never lose a case!"

Back home!

Back in her own bed!

What could be more delightful, more delicious?

And there was more good news awaiting her. The whole time she had been down in the Neitherworld had only lasted one night up here in the real world. It was now two minutes to eight. Eight A.M.

She crawled into her four-poster bed and pulled the black sheets up to her chin. She certainly

didn't need to hear any scary bedtime stories now. She was dead tired! She was—

Asleep!

"Ah," said her father with a smile, leaning over her bed. Look how peacefully she's sleeping. Too bad I have to wake her up."

He shook Lydia's shoulder.

"No, no," she mumbled. "Please—"

"Sorry, Pumpkin. You don't want to be late."

"Oh, I do! I do!"

"C'mon, now" he called as he left the room. "Rise and shine!"

Lydia sighed.

At least there was one good thing about today, she told herself. Beetlejuice had promised to give her the day off. Unless she called for him, he wouldn't show his face.

Without the ghost around to make trouble, she figured she could handle being sleepy, no problem.

She sat up in bed and stretched. Then Lydia got up and looked in her dresser mirror. She was relieved to see her own tired face staring back at her. No Beetlejuice.

"C'mon, Pumpkin!" called Charles from downstairs. "It's time for school."

Lydia screamed.

Her face had instantly turned lavender, her eyes had grown large and yellow, her teeth had become bucked and green.

"Like the man says," said Beetlejuice from inside the mirror. "It's time for ghoul!"

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